Depot Town Rag

February 1989

FREE 100% BAS CONTENT

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI

Newest sign:

"No Parking, private property" on 'coal yard'

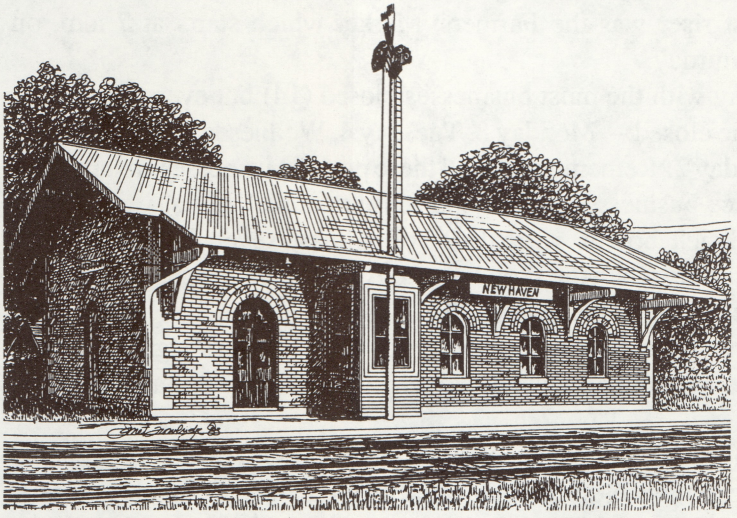
(Editor's note: A few of our regular readers criticized our not reporting the conviction of a former Depot Town business manager at the end of 1988.

"You don't tell the whole story," they said. And they're right. We usually try to be upbeat and positive, leaving the police and crime beats to the dailies.

But the following item is bad news; the kind of stuff that escalates into law suits, fist fights, even wars. And we're going to report it as objectively as possible.)

That space behind the Masonic Block was closed to parking in January, and many who parked there previously were surprised to find that the 'coal yard' was not a public parking lot. Former managers of the Sidetrack claim they own the property and are prohibiting patrons, residents and anyone else from parking there.

Old photos show five tall brick silos used for (continued on page 3)



Signs of life

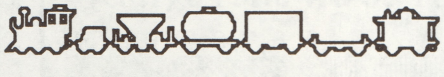
in Ypsilanti's historic **Depot Town** are documented in this issue. Winter gives the impression that nothing is growing, but this old commercial district blooms all year long.

Janet Francouer's drawing of the depot at New Haven, MI

"Still standing along the Grand Trunk Western's Detroit-Port Huron line, the depot at New Haven, built in 1858 by the Chicago, Detroit & Grand Trunk Junction Railroad, is among a group of similar brick buildings at Fraser, Mount Clemens and Richmond that are now the oldest depots in the state. The Smith's Creek depot in Greenfield Village is from this group."

- from Michigan Historical Society's "Brackets & Bargeboards.

(Maybe it's a good thing no one as famous as Thomas Edison ever lived in Depot Town. Henry Ford might have bought all the buildings and moved them to Dearborn.- ed)



Signs of change in the Historic District

Styles of architecture and advertising change, and even such bastions of tradition as little, old fashioned Depot Town change. This month's issue calls attention to the current and historical graphic displays in our neighborhood.

This year's visits to the City's Historic District Commission show that they, too, can change their minds about things. Only five years ago they favored wall-mounted boards flat against the building today are encouraging perpendicular signs (Miller's, Esquire Interiors, Old Town Restaurant) which can be read from either direction up and down the sidewalk.

Their position on awnings has changed, too, and that's only to be expected with the turnover they have experienced on that commission. As this district leads the way in historical preservation, we continue to try new and refreshing ways to reflect the past.

Watch for still more 'signs of life' is this old commercial district.

Antiquers go underground

Jan and Nels Gower of 33 East Cross have pushed their basement showroom so far south that you'll think you must be under the buildings across the street. Long used as the storeroom for the bar at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, this recently reclaimed lower level now boasts a surprising number of square feet of exhibit space for this top quality local antiques gallery.

And the whole two levels of this exciting repository of things old is filled to the walls with the collection of thirty-six different antique dealers -- continuing the tradition of Depot Town being the place for 'antiquing.'

Details, details

"Come in; we're open" or "Sorry, we're closed."

Signs of the times posted & counted

Of the forty active businesses in the Depot Town district, just more than half (21) have their business hours posted at the entry. Compiling these facts only gives us a look at a slight majority of the commercial hours and business patterns on the block but, if more will post them, we'll survey them again. The clientele might appreciate it.

Four places announced they were open seven days a week. Ten were open six days. Four held four-day weeks. One business is only open three days a week and two are open twice a week.

The latest operating business each night was the one bar with posted hours until 1 a.m. The earliest riser was the Farmers' Market which starts at 7 a.m. on Wednesday and Saturday.

Sunday is the day with the most businesses closed (14) but every day of the week finds someone closed -- Monday 8, Tuesday 4, Wednesday 2, Thursday 3, Friday 1, and Saturday 2. Remember that all these posted businesses are not retail shops. Some service businesses make good sense on a M-F basis.

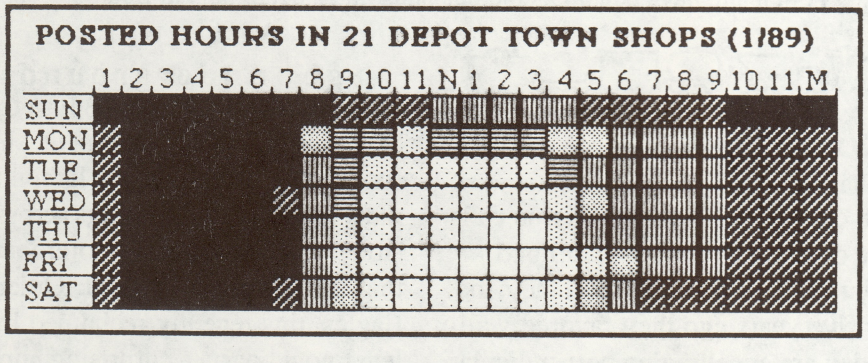
Sidewalk sandwich boards sit in front of at least seven business, some permanently, others only when the shop is open. A few boards, signs or windows announced 'open' even when they were closed.

Even as our reporter peered through windows at the tiny 'hours' signs, potential customers accompanied him and wondered why so many places have no hours posted.

Far from operating on a mall management concept, Depot Town entrepreneurs exhibit a fierce independence, sometimes at the inconvienience of their clientele.

Sunday is the most meager shopping day in the district, with mostly antique shops open, while Friday afternoon sees the most shops open. The greatest daily concentration of open stores happens Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Although only a little more than half the figures are available, here is the breakdown as posted in the neighborhood in January of 1989:



Perhaps, when the rest of the merchants post their hours, we'll find that we rival the outlying shopping centers.

City Body
20 East Cross Street
Front end alignment
and
Collision repair

City Radiator
100 North River
483-2248

An electrifying local QUIZ

How well do you know Depot Town after dark? See if you can identify the district's incandescent and neon sign slogans from the following descriptions: (correct answers are under the flap to your right)

1. In the old tradition of ourdoor advertising, this blue, white, yellow and red billboard says "Welcome."

2. "There's nothing finer" is the slogan accompanying this clock.

3. New neon announces "Vertical" and "Custom " products in their line.

4. Red and white diagonals can be seen from the Cross Street Bridge and call attention to the "open" sign at this popular restaurant.

5. More new neon calls attention to "allignments" and "repairs" which have taken place here since the 1930's.

6. An artful squiggle symbolizes the creativity herein.

7. Found in a used neon sale, the name fit and the sun'll come up tomorrow for these vignettes of vintage clothing.

8. The unique name for the product was shaped to fit the strangest window shape on the block. A blue border surrounds the red neon letters.

9. "Open" is in red gas, the border in green. All reds wouldn't have looked as good but would still be appropriate.

10. Only half of these four signs still apply, but the theme is as right as ever: "darts," "pizza," "burgers" & "billiards."

11. "Since 1896" does not apply to the local address, but the parent company. The window's red neon omits the date.

12. Double Ts and Os always surprise us in this old workingman's staple.

13. These three brand names only appear in movies for nostalgic auto enthusiasts any more.

14. Their pink, red and blue accents the product them make - with an example of their craft, itself.

Ted's Auto Electric
307 North River
483-1238

Answers to the "electrifying quiz" at left:

1. The"Welcome" sing on the west wall of the Follett House was erected by the Depot Town Association in 1986.

2. Empire Paints at 11 East Cross is the perfect place for historical color schemes to begin.

3. "Vertical Blinds" and "Custom Draperies" can always be found at Esquire Interiors at 10 East Cross.

4. The Mean Bean's artsy slashes of color call you to the intimate dining atmosphere of old Mexico.

5. City Body's new neon is only a hint of the elegant new office/waiting room just inside.

6. That's not a sign; that was *art* in the window of the Depot Town Art Gallery at 17 East Cross. But it's gone now. So is the Gallery which opened in August but co-oped its way only one month into the new year. Watch for its return in another form soon.

7. Apple Annie's glowing announcement was actually designed for someone else and was recylced (perfectly) to this combination antique furniture/vintage clothing shop.

8. "Futons" is announced from a sidelight window of The Dragon's Lair. Their other shop windows were bricked up or painted over years ago.

9. Red Rooster Pizza & Ice Cream shows a sparkling interior in what was once the district apothecary, Weber Drug.

10. Aubree's Saloon was the first of the new generation to hang neon back in their windows. It's both modern and traditional.

11. Miller's Dairy is almost as old as Depot Town and they found a perfect location for Miller's Ice Cream Parlor here.

12. Picture Perfect Tattoos is the best tattoo parlor in a railroad district since the height of both ancient industries.

13. "Hudson," "Essex," and "Terraplane" won't show up in today's TV commercials, but revivalists of the industrial age are still drawn to Miller Motors at the corner of Cross, River and the railroad tracks.

14. "Accent Neon" curves their glass tube letters around a clock in their River Street studio where they manufacture just the product studied in this quiz.

How did you do? We suspect that anyone reading **The Rag** and taking this little test already knew all this anyway. If you missed any, it's probably just because some of them are new. Maybe it's time for another nighttime stroll. The Festival of Lights continues . . . down in Depot Town.

YPSI DIXIT:

Antique dealers often get terribly tired of hearing people exclaim that they "had one just like that but threw it away during last spring's housecleaning."

Worse yet, is the potential customer who bends their ear telling how they remember when their Grandma had one years ago.

One of our local dealers harbors a sign he puts out only on days when he feels sarcasm will help him make it to closing:

"The only person who cared what your Grandmother had was your Grandfather!"

He keeps it out of sight most of the time.

'Coal yard' locked (from page 1)

storing coal standing alongside a railroad spur from the main line and even earlier maps designate the space as a fenced lot used for selling, collecting and selling wood for fuel. Today, the lot only provides fuel for controversy in the district.

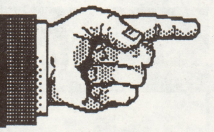
When former Sidetrack manager, Jim Shedd, went to prison, his wife, Linda, announced to adjacent neighbors who were in the habit of parking there that the lot would be locked up beginning in mid-January.

Regular 'Trackers will remember two recent times when this popular bar/restaurant was closed down for extended periods of time due to 'management changes.' Apparently some of these changes have to do with who owns the parking lot.

Meanwhile, customers, neighbors and fellow business folk hope the usual good will and cameraderie will return to this end of the block. 'Good times' can still be found, but not in the parking lot.

J&R TRADING POST
GENERAL STORE
"A blend of past & present,
with an eye on the future!"
21 East Cross • 483-5870

The most welcome signs of all



Every new business thrills at the placement of their 'shingle,' but the tiny signs that direct the public to Depot Town were probably the most difficult to put up. Countless meetings, memos and pleas finally paid off (it took eight years!) and now the rest of the world can enter this town and find Downtown, EMU and Depot Town. Now, that's progress!

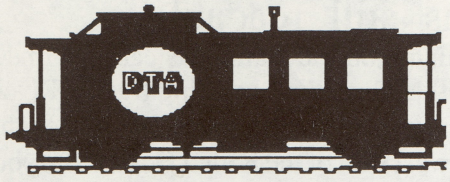
City Body's newest project

The workers at 20 East Cross just won't stop. After restoring and revitalizing that old auto body shop, the Sobbry brothers then restored the facade to its original magnificence. Neighborhood wags described their feat as a body workout more astonishing than Jane Fonda's. But they couldn't stop there.

This winter's project has been the remodeling of their front office and customer waiting room. Following the recent traditon of Aubree's Second Floor, Standard Printing, Miller's Ice Cream Parlor, and many others on the block, the handsome new interior looks like it might have when it was new -- only more energy-efficient and practical.

You don't have to wait until your car gets wrecked to see it, either. It's all right there in the front window. Doug Dillon's Suncatcher Construction did much of the handiwork.

YPSILANTI RECYCLING PROJECT
651 Rice Street
Open every Saturday
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Collecting newspapers, glass, used motor oil and ferrous cans
A non-proft organization



D.T.A. 19 January 1989

Guests: Mark Cotter, Finn's JM&J Insurance.

Minutes of last month's ;meeting were approved.

Treasurer's report: $1690.13 in General Fund.

Standing Committees:

Budget & Events:

- Negotiations were initiated at the Decem er 29 executive committee meeting regarding the production of the 1989 Frog Island Blues & Jazz Festival. A motion was initiated and passed instructing the executive committee to complete negotiations. A contract is in the works which would allow a second party to leasae the user rights of the Festival name.

- It was also agreed that DTA will explore new partnerships in order to revive the Winter Jazz Series for the 1990 series and approach the Heritage Festival committe regarding proprietership of our 'Deepot Town Bar.

NIFTY

- Jerry Meadows urges us all to open a book, the phone book to be exact. Depot Town is identified as the #1 stop on a tour through Michigan's 2nd largest historic district.

- Antique understanding and appraiposal is a Nifty idea for a feature event at proposed weekend fairs and shows.

Membership & Volunteerism

- Rag editor, Tom Dodd, is enlisting the help of DTA members in updating and corroborating names, addresses & phone numbers on our membership list. If you're not receiving The Rag, but would like to, contact Tom via The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

Caboose

- For your occasion or celebrations or just for fun, rent the Caboose. Only $25 per event, $10 key deposit. Contact Gary McKeever @ 485-4856.

2nd Vice Presidents:

Foundation: no report.

Engineering Society: For help around the house, the yard and the neighborhood, contact the Engineers via The Old Caboose mail slot.

Artists & Artisans: Look for the Artists & Artisans' new logo appearing more often as this new cooperative shows its spirit. Currently the A&A are developing a 6-month calendar ofspecial shows.

Antique Engine Club - no report.

Merchants - no report.

Other business:

- Marianne McDonald reported that the DTA is not qualifed to sponsor a bingo game, since we do not fit in a qualifying category of service, fraternal, church or senior center as defined by the state.

- The DTA will make a gift of $1000 to the Freight House to be used for entrance construction/reconstruction. The money is inulfillment of a pledge to be matched by the Heritage Festival Committee. Gary Urick, Freight House manager, has agreed to accept our contribution in the form of necessary architectural services to be contracted by the DTA.

- Mark Cotter, of Finn's JM&J Ins. Co, reported that no figures are available for sorely needed insurance alternatvies.

Golden Goose Award - Continued coarse and crude grafitti artlessness.

Best Yet Award - City Body's continued classiness. Love that neon!

February 1989

Depot Towners are invited to partici-pate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Foundation

8 p.m. Thursday, 2/2

in The Old Caboose

Merchants

5:15 p.m. Thursday, 2/16

Old Town Restaurant

Association

7:30 p.m. Thursday, 2/16

in The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club

7:00 p.m. Thursday 2/23

Freight House Coffee Shop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving theunique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Jacob Guter, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Heritage Fest to feature watertower

No circus, no Wallendas; but 100-year-olds to be featured at 11th annual history celebration.

Festival planning has already begun with two staples being cut from this year's program. Neither the famous high wire act nor the Franzen Brothers' Circus will appear this August 18,19 & 20th.

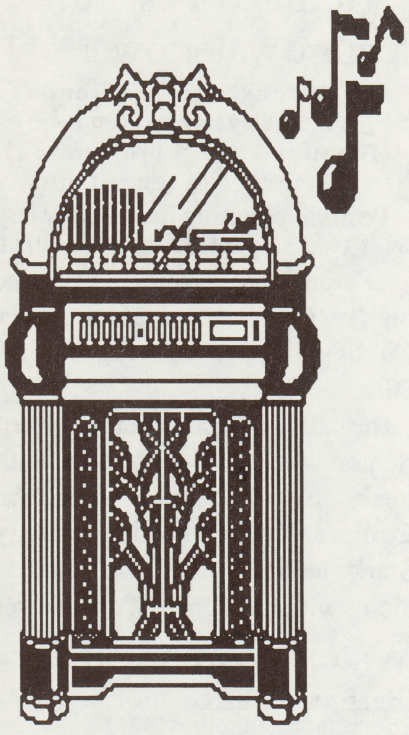
The call is out, however for information on what else will be one hundred years old in 1989. Highland Cemetery's Richardsonian-style Starkweather Chapel is a candidate, along with the famed Water Tower.

Water Tower listed

(**Heritage News**, Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation, January 1989)

The Foundation recently received a letter announcing that "The Michigan Historical Commission is pleased to inform you that the Ypsilanti Water Works Stand Pipe, Ypsilanti, Washtenaw County, has been listed in the State Register of Historic Places." The letter, written by Martha M. Bigelow, Director of the Bureau of History and Executive Secretary of the Michigan Historical Commission, continues with an extensive description of the architecture and history of the tower. The Foundation will file this document under "Water Tower" for those who want further details.

ADDED HISTORY: We may note that in the EMU Aurora, 1894, is the following description of this great monument: ". . . towering 150 feet high is the stand pipe, in which is a huge reservoir, containing the water supply of the city. The water is obtained from a flowing well in the valley near the river, and is forced to the reservoir by steam power. Chemical analysis has shown that its purity is equaled by few and excelled by no other water supply in the United States. The whole system is very efficient."



Jazz still lives

down in Depot Town

Although DTA's Winter Jazz Series had to be cancelled due to financial exigencies, Association officers report plans are in progress for the June Frog Island Jazz Festival.

An annual event which draws up to 3500 music fans from around the region and deep into the jazz audience, the concert will experience new directions and leadership as one of the coming summer's leading artistic events.

Radio station WEMU and the Depot Town Association have been meeting throughout the winter to streamline operations for the day-long concert event whose performers will be announced soon.

Welcome our new sponsor whose message appears at right. Here's another SIGN that creative opportunities exist in the 19th Century style. They're in excellent company!

Oldest neighborhood signs still readable

How many of the district's original painted-on-the-wall signs can you find? Depot Exchange's new poster on the south wall of their building (facing River Street) is too easy. That's a modern version of what we're talking about, though. So is the wood-mounted DTA sign on the west wall of the Follett House. But you get the idea.

See if you can still read any of the overlapping bills on the rest of the Follett House wall. Mayflower Storage reads in two layers and it's difficult to tell which is more recent. That same wall shows a shirt laundry's yellow-backed sign which may have even included a model showing the product. The top left of the facade holds the remnants of the controversial Bull Durham ad (not the movie; the tobacco!) Controversial because of the placement of the bull. Proper Victorian towns (like Ypsilanti) placed a fence post discretely in front of his maleness. Today, only the fencepost remains. The rest is a blur.

The Newel Block (Ike's, Miller's, Bell Book & Candle) still reveals the ubiquitous Mail Pouch wall sign. Although they still make the tobacco, building owner, Rex Richie, says the company is not interested in repainting the old sign. Maybe he'll have to peel it down to the one underneath it: old photos reveal an ad for "Swamp Root" in that same location. We don't know if that was a patent medicine or what. Maybe it caused cancer and went out of business. Maybe not.

Aubree's Saloon's east wall still shows "buffet" and "lunch" peeping out from the mortar between the bricks. Look more closely at the front in the right sunlight and you'll see hints of "The Oliver House" hiding between the second floor windows and the cornice above. (Look real hard. Harder than that! Well, maybe it's *too* subtle.)

More ancient ads lurked on the west wall of City Body but were painted over last year. Coco-Cola's reputation is almost as old as City Body's, and both company's successes continue.

The west wall above Ike's Depot Barbershop holds hints for the active urban archeologist. Scour the Ypsilanti Historical Museum for past photos of what was Ypsilanti's biggest department store --The Davis Company -- and see what it may have said in past years. Only the background colors remain.

Perhaps the best known outdoor ad in the district is the one *inside* the Old Town Restaurant. Recent renovations uncovered what was under the plaster from a later addition and the "Fink's Overalls - they wear like a pig's nose" was restored for the edification of local diners.

Patronize the merchants who bring you the monthly
Depot Town Rag

Teachers Shop and Learning Center

15 E. Cross • Depot Town • 482-6373

Educational Resources
For Parents, Teachers and Kids. Come see our complete line, plus non-competitive games and much more!

Hansen's
STANDARD
483-0339
PRINTING
Depot Town

Good Food

Sidetrack
Good Food, Good Drinks, Good Times
56 East Cross Street
483-1053

•

Aubree's Saloon & Second Floor
39 East Cross Street

•

Old Town Restaurant
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
38 East Cross Street

•

37 East Cross • 483-4555

Olde Towne Coin & Gold
18 East Cross
483-6155

Hon's Flowers & Fancies
46 East Cross
482-2124

RAGTIME
Signs of Life Down in Depot Town

Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market
in historic Depot Town
Every Wed. & Sat.
8 a.m. — 3 p.m.

at the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market
Messina's Cheese
483-1480

Miller's Since 1940
ICE CREAM
Open All Year!
42 E. CROSS
HISTORIC DEPOT TOWN

Our Little Secret
Resale Clothing & Other Niceties
23 E. Cross Street
483-3637

YPSI FOOD COOP
Whole Natural Food In Bulk or Small Quantities
M,T,Th,F 10-7; Wed. 10-9
Sat. 9-7; Sun. 12-5
483-1520

Antiques

Jim MacDonald's Antiques
&
Apple Annie's
Vintage Clothing
29 East Cross • 481-0555

Thompson Building Mall-
Over 4000 sq. ft, of dealers
412 North River • 484-4288

Something for Everyone
CROSS STREET ANTIQUES
33 East Cross Street
Antiques Bought & Sold
Hours: Tues - Sun 11-5
482-4525

We love to buy
Antiques
DEPOT EXHANGE ANTIQUES
54 E. Cross • 482-1780
Next to Sidetrack
Professional Stripping & Refinishing

Big Bob's Magazines
Magazines Comics Posters
50 East Cross • 485-4930

Ike's Depot Barbershop
40 East Cross Street

RIVER ARTWORKS
48 E. CROSS
DEPOT TOWN
CUSTOM FRAMING
DESIGNER MATS
482-8785

Depot Doo
Fine Design in Hair Style
25 East Cross Street
484-3045